



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release July 16, 2003

Agencies to Host Public Hearing for Mt Top Mining Environmental Impact Statement

HUNTINGTON, WV.... Two regional public hearings will be held for the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on Mountaintop Mining/Valley Fills in Appalachia. The public is invited to provide oral or written comments. The draft EIS recommends new actions to further enhance protection for Appalachian streams from effects associated with mountaintop coal mining.

The July 22 meeting will be held in Hazard, Ky., and July 24 meeting at Charleston, W.Va. Hosting agencies are the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Office of Surface Mining, and West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection.

The draft EIS became available May 30 for a 90-day public review period. These public hearing are being held to provide the Appalachian communities with an opportunity to provide oral comments. The usual review period is 45 days; the extended public review is to encourage broadest participation and provide additional time to review the complexities of the content.

July 22, 2-5pm and 7-11pm

The Forum at the Hal Rogers Center
101 Bulldog Lane
Hazard, Ky.

July 24, 2-5pm and 7-11pm

Charleston Civic Center Little Theater
200 Civic Center Drive
Charleston, W.Va.

Information in the draft EIS shows that program improvements put in place by Federal and State agencies since 1998 are contributing to increased environmental protection during mountaintop coal mining. Permit data comparing surface coal mining operations approved since 1998 with those authorized for the five years prior to 1998 show that the total area of Appalachian watersheds covered by valley fills was decreased by over 50 percent and the total length of streams covered by those fills was cut by over 25 percent.

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The draft EIS evaluates a broad range of additional Federal and State actions proposed to further prevent or reduce adverse environmental impacts to Appalachian streams and forests, as well as to clarify lines of responsibility among the agencies designed to improve compliance with and enforcement of the Clean Water Act and the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act.

Among the recommendations of the draft EIS: better stream protection; improved compensatory mitigation requirements to ensure replacement of lost aquatic functions through stream restoration; more watershed level advance planning to identify environmental resources where impacts should be avoided; review current Clean Water Act water quality standards to ensure they protect against potential water quality impacts downstream of mining operations; clarify regulations to ensure that fills, when necessary, are as small as possible and located where they cause the least environmental impact; develop Best Management Practices for mine site reclamation to minimize adverse environmental impacts; and promote the benefits of reforestation.

A limited number of CD versions of the draft EIS document will be available at the hearings while supplies last. Copies of the draft EIS may be requested by calling the EPA Region 3 toll free EIS request hotline at 1-800-228-8711 or at the website <http://www.epa.gov/region3/mtnstop>

Written comments should be submitted by August 29, 2003 to Mr. John Forren, U.S. EPA (3EA30), 1650 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

For more information, please contact Suzanne Fournier at (513) 684-3010 or David Hewitt (202) 761-0289 of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, John Millett at (202) 564-7842 or Bonnie Smith (215) 814-5543 of EPA, Mitch Snow of the Fish and Wildlife Service at (202) 208-5634, Mike Gauldin of the Office of Surface Mining at (202) 208-2565, or Jessica Greathouse of the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection at (304) 558-4253.